



# NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **County Nutritionists Encourage All to be Food Safe this Holiday Season**

**Durham, NC-** Now that the holiday season is in full gear, so is the celebratory eating. Food is an important part of many holiday occasions, but along with indulging of favorite dishes, holiday meals can bring illness when they are not handled safely. In fact, an estimated 76 million cases and 5,000 deaths attributed to food-borne illnesses occur every year in the United States.

“It takes organization and good timing to pull off a safe holiday meal,” says Kelly Warnock, a nutritionist at the Durham County Health Department. “But with a little planning, there are many things you can do to keep foods safe.”

According to Warnock individuals are food safe when the following tips are used this holiday season: individuals plan, clean, separate, cook, chill, keep hot foods hot, and keep cold foods cold.

**Plan.** Start with a plan for everything you will do. Think about your refrigerator, freezer, and oven space and how you’ll keep hot foods hot at 140 degrees or higher and cold foods cold at 40 degrees or below. If you need to use coolers, make sure you have plenty of clean ice and check it frequently to make sure the ice has not melted. “Don’t put food that is not on ice outside to keep it cold,” says Warnock.

**Clean.** Remember to wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before, during, and after handling food. Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs that cause foodborne illness. Wash all kitchen utensils, dishes, and countertops with hot water and soap. Wash all fresh produce.

**Separate.** Don’t let germs spread from one food product to another. This is especially true for raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Keep raw foods separate from ready-to-eat foods. Use different cutting boards or wash, rinse and sanitize after contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood. Never use the utensils and dishware that have touched raw foods, such as meat, fish and poultry, to store fresh or cooked foods unless they have been washed.

**Cook.** Cook foods to the proper temperatures. These high temperatures are needed to kill the harmful germs that cause most foodborne illnesses. Just because a meat looks brown does not mean it is safe to eat. Always check the internal temperature of cooked foods with a food thermometer. A chart of such temperatures can be found at [www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/mintemp.html](http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/mintemp.html)

**Chill.** Refrigerate promptly. Refrigerating foods quickly keeps most harmful germs from growing and multiplying. Refrigerators should be kept at 40 degrees Fahrenheit and freezers at 0 degrees Fahrenheit.

**Keep hot food hot and cold foods cold.** Temperatures between 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit are considered in the “danger zone.” Hot foods should be kept at 140°F or hotter to prevent the growth of harmful germs. Hold cold foods at 40°F or colder. Any perishable foods held in the danger zone for more than two hours should be thrown away.

**Handle leftovers safely.** All leftovers should be eaten within three days. And remember, leftovers are only leftovers once! Once you reheat one time, throw out any food that has not been eaten.

“Be food safe for the health of you and your family during this holiday season. Happy eating!”

For more information about food safety and nutrition, contact Kelly Warnock at 919-560-7857 or email [kwarnock@durhamcountync.gov](mailto:kwarnock@durhamcountync.gov) Additional information about food safety can be found at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov), [www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu).

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